

From *Sinn und Wesen* to *Structural Hearing*: The Development of Felix Salzer's Ideas in  
Interwar Vienna and Their Transmission in Postwar United States

Felix Salzer (1904-1986) is perhaps *the* pivotal figure in the history of music theory of the early twentieth century. A native of Vienna, Austria, and pupil of both Heinrich Schenker and Guido Adler, Salzer came to the United States at the outbreak of World War II and became the principal transmitter of Schenker's ideas, which continue to dominate music theory. His 1952 textbook *Structural Hearing* paved the way for generations of musicians and scholars interested in Schenkerian thinking, first in the United States and later abroad. Today, *Structural Hearing* has mostly fallen out of favor, but its resonance can still be felt in just about every area of music-theoretical research.

Despite such enormous influence, Salzer's work—and the history that lay behind it—has yet to receive any thorough treatment; and, while his American scholarship is still known to many, his earlier work as a Viennese scholar has been all but forgotten. This study takes the first steps in understanding the entire compass of Salzer's life and work by investigating his Viennese scholarship, its intellectual context, and its connection to *Structural Hearing*.

As a pupil of Adler in the 1920s, Salzer was immersed in the burgeoning discipline of *Musikwissenschaft* and in Adler's pioneering work on *Stillehre*. Though trained in Adler's method, he ultimately came to question its efficacy in portraying the historical development of Western art music. Because of this, he devoted his early scholarship to critiquing *Musikwissenschaft* and proposing another type of music history, one from the point of view of the “inner musical content”—his 1935 book, *Sinn und*

*Wesen der abendländischen Mehrstimmigkeit*, represents the culmination of such a vision. By utilizing Schenker's concept of *Auskomponierung* ("composing-out") and the cultural philosophies of Oswald Spengler, Salzer posited a history that would explain the entire course of Western music history. Through a close examination of this book and those leading up to it, we can better come to grips with the development of Salzer's ideas and thus have a much deeper understanding of the shape that they eventually took in *Structural Hearing*, which more than any other single work set the agenda for American Music Theory after World War II.